(b) if so, the details thereof and Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL): (a) and (b) No such statement has been made by the British Labour Party.

Pakistan Premier's offer to hold Talks with India

483. SHRI RAM DAS AGARWAL: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Prime Minister of India responded positively to Pakistan Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif's offer to hold talks between the two governments and suggested meeting first at the Foreign Ministers' level for normalising relations and to sort out outstanding issues; and

(b) if so, the progress in this regard made so far indicating at which level and when the talks are likely to be held?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL): (a) and (b) Prime Minister has, in this letter of felicitations to the new Prime Minister of Pakistan, proposed an early resumption of a wide ranging comprehensive bilateral dialogue at an appropriate level on all issues of mutual concern. Prime Minister has conveyed that there are a number of opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation and that we approach these in a positive and constructive spirit.

Indo-British Joint Collaboration

484. SHRIMATI JAYANTI PATNAIK: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have taken steps to establish joint collaboration between India and United Kingdom;

(b) whether some pacts haved been recently signed between the two countries;

(c) if so, the areas in which the collaborations been made; and

(d) the details of the pacts made in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL): (a) An Indo-British Partnership, earlier known as the Indo-British Partnership Initiative, has been in existence from 1993 to promote closer economic cooperation, particularly between the private sectors.

(b) During the partnership Summit organised in January in Calcutta by the confederation of Indian Industries, several agreements were signed between Indian companies and their British counterparts; these were not agreements between the countries or Governments.

(c) An inter-Governmental MOU has been signed with the UK in January on "Cooperation in coal-related industries".

(d) The MOU establishes an Indo-British Coal Forum, which would be a partnership between the coal related industries of the United Kingdom and India; it wouldd be supported by the Governments and provide a link between them and industry. Several cooperative activities have been identified under the MOU.

America's Kashmir Policy

485. SHRI KRISHNA KUMAR BIRLA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the recent statement of the U.S. Asstt. Secretary of State Ms. Robin Raphel that the elections in Jammu & Kashmir have not resolved the issue and that Kashmir remains a disputed territory for the US policy on Kashmir; and

(b) if so, whether the statement reflects US policy on Kashmir; and

(c) if so, the reaction of Government with regard thereto?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL): (a) and (b) Government has been press items

regarding remarks on elections in Jammu & Kashmir reportedly made by US Assistant Secretary Robin Raphel in her interaction with the press during her visit to India in February 1997. This subject was not discussed in the official meetings during the visit, since this is an internal matter.

(c) Government of India has made it clear that Jammu & Kashmir is an integral part of India. This position is well known to the US Government.

Indo-Bangladesh Relations

486. SHRIMATI JAYANTI PATNAIK: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have a proposal to improve Indo-Bangladesh ties;

(b) if so, the various programmes drawn up and efforts made to improve better relation between both the countries;

(c) whether Indo-Bangladesh Joint Commission has met in Delhi or Dhaka to settle the disputes and balance the trade between both the countries; and

(d) if so, the outcome thereof?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I. K. GUJRAL): (a) and (b) The Government remains committed to the maintenance of friendly and cooperative relations with Bangladesh. A regular high level dialogue has been maintained with Bangladesh through exchange of visits at the level of Prime Minister and Minister of External Affairs of India, and the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Bangladesh. During these visits it was agreed to work for resolution of all outstanding issues and enhance bilateral relations in all fields. The Treaty between India and Bangladesh on Sharing of the Ganga waters at Farakka was signed during Bangladesh Prime Minister's visit to India from December 10—12, 1996. India has agreed to extend tariff concessions on selected Bangladesh goods which could be exported to India. A festival of Indian culture was held from November 18—30, 1996 in Bangladesh.

(c) No, Sir.

(d) Does not arise.

श्रीलंका के साथ व्यापार संबंध

487. **श्री सोमपाल:** क्या विदेश मंत्री यह बताने की कृपा करेंगे कि:

(क) क्या प्रधानमंत्री ने अपने हाल ही के श्रीलंका के दौरे के समय श्रीलंका से व्यापार सुधार संबंधी बातचीत की पहल की थी;

(ख) यदि हां, तो उसके मुख्य-मुख्य निष्कर्षों का ब्यौरा क्या है;

(ग) क्या इस संबंध में कोई ठोस सुझाव दिये गये हैं अथवा किसी समझौते पर हस्ताक्षर किये गये हैं; और

(घ) यदि नहीं, तो तत्संबंधी ब्यौरा क्या है?

विदेश मंत्री (श्री इन्द्र कुमार गुजराल: (क) प्रधान मंत्री ने हाल ही में श्रीलंका की कोई यात्रा नहीं की है। बहरहाल विदेश मंत्री 19 से 22 जनवरी, 1997 तक श्री लंका की यात्रा पर गए।

(ख) से (घ) इस यात्रा के दौरान भारत-श्रीलंका संयुक्त आयोग के तीसरे सत्र का आयोजन किया गया। दोनों पक्ष द्विपक्षीय आर्थिक सहयोग को सरल बनाने और उसमें विस्तार करने के लिए और अधिक उपाय करने पर सहमत हुए हैं। दोनों देशों के बीच निवेश संवर्धन और संरक्षण से संबद्ध एक करार सम्पन हुआ। यह करार निवेशों के अधिक प्रवाह को सुसाध्य बनाने में एक व्यापक विधिक रूप रेखा प्रदान करेगा। जनवरी, 1996 में श्रीलंका को प्रदत्त ऋण श्रृंखला की 15 मिलियन अमरीकी डालर की दूसरी किश्त देने के लिए भी एक करार पर हस्ताक्षर हुए। यह भी सूचित किया गया कि भारत श्रीलंका के निर्यात संबंधी हितों की अनेक मदों पर से अपनी ओर से गैर-टैरिफ अवरोध हटा लेगा और टैरिफ कम कर देगा। ब्यौरे भारत में होने वाली सरकारी स्तर की बातचीत में तय किए जायेंगे। दोनों पक्षों ने एक-दूसरे के प्रति बेहतर जागरूकता पैदा करने की दृष्टि से दोनों देशों के, व्यवसायियों और शीर्षस्थ व्यापारी निकायों के बीच अधिक मात्रा में परस्पर क्रियाकलाप सुचारू रूप से करने का भी निर्णय लिया।